

THE YELLOW BOOK



THE OUTLANDISH HUMOUR OF
CRAD KILODNEY

THE YELLOW BOOK

CRAD KILODNEY

To Bill Kaplan,

Crad Kilodney

CHARNEL HOUSE

Toronto, Canada

Also by Crad Kilodney

Mental Cases (Lowlands Review, 1978)
World Under Anaesthesia (Charnel House, 1979)
Gainfully Employed In Limbo (Charnel House, 1980)
Lightning Struck My Dick (Virgo Press, 1980)
Human Secrets -- Book One (Charnel House, 1981)
Human Secrets -- Book Two (Charnel House, 1982)
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Pork College (Coach House Press, 1984)
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The Orange Book (Charnel House, 1984)
The Blue Book (Charnel House, 1985)
The Green Book (Charnel House, 1985)
The Scarlet Book (Charnel House, 1985)
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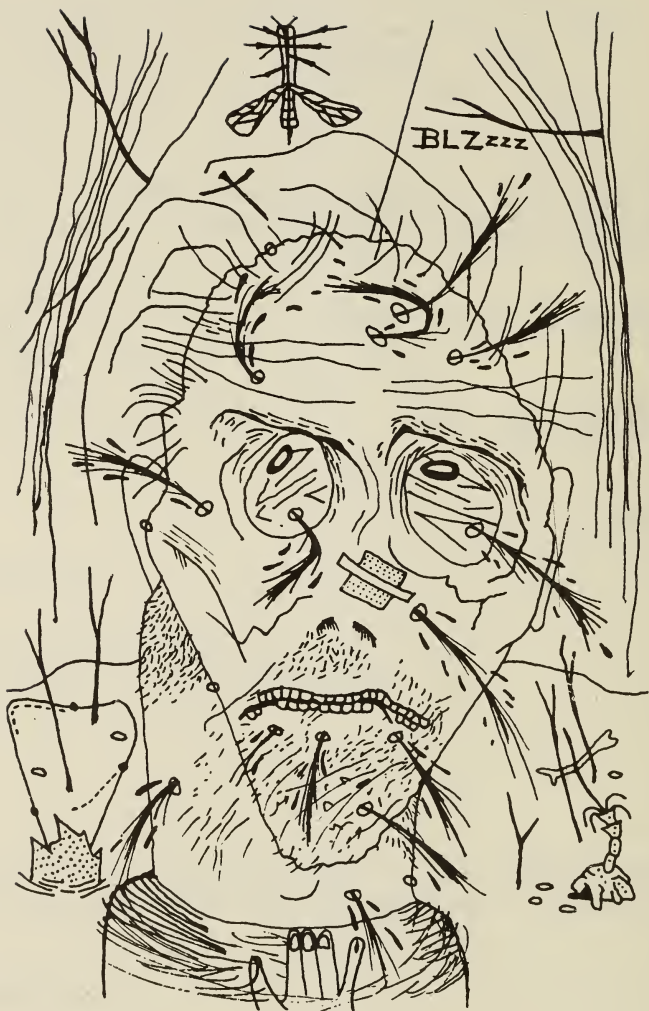
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The Soul of Modern Man

MESSAGE FROM THE PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY
COMMITTEE AGAINST INDISCIPLINE

IS THERE ANY DEAD BODY ON YOUR STREET CREATING A DISTURBANCE? IS THERE A MAD DOG THAT IS ALLOWED TO ROAM FREELY AND DISOBEY ITS MASTER? IS THERE AN ILLEGAL AUTO REPAIR SHOP HIDING IN YOUR DWELLING? THE PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEE AGAINST INDISCIPLINE EXPECTS ALL CITIZENS TO BEHAVE IN A DISCIPLINED MANNER AND CORRECT SUCH ABUSES. THIS NEW EFFORT IS KNOWN AS THE PEOPLE'S NATIONAL PROGRAM AGAINST INDISCIPLINE. IT EXISTS FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL CLASSES OF CITIZENS, AND EVERY CITIZEN IS EXPECTED TO BEAR HIS SHARE OF THE BURDEN IN ERADICATING INDISCIPLINE AND BRINGING TO THE NATION A SENSE OF DISCIPLINE, DUTY, AND SOCIAL AWARENESS.

NO DEAD BODY SHOULD BE LEFT IN THE STREET LONGER THAN NECESSARY. IF IT IS UNCLAIMED, CITIZENS LIVING ON THAT STREET SHOULD TAKE IT TO A FIELD TO BE BURIED. NOTIFY THE POLICE IF THE BODY APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN SHOT OR HAS HAD ANY LIMBS REMOVED RECENTLY.

NO DOG IS ALLOWED TO ROAM FREELY UNLESS ITS MASTER IS ATTACHED TO IT BY A ROPE OR CHAIN. ANY DOG WHICH BITES A NEIGHBOR MAY RESULT IN ITS MASTER BEING FINED IF IT IS A SECOND OFFENSE.

NO CITIZEN MAY RUN AN ILLEGAL AUTO REPAIR SHOP OR OTHER BUSINESS IN HIS DWELLING UNTIL OBTAINING A PERMIT TO DO SO. THE PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEE AGAINST INDISCIPLINE IS TAKING A HARSH STAND AGAINST THE EVASION OF TAXES.

ARE YOU SUPPORTING THE PEOPLE'S NATIONAL PROGRAM AGAINST INDISCIPLINE? TALK ABOUT IT WITH YOUR FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND CO-WORKERS. IT IS THE MEANS BY WHICH OUR NATION CAN ADVANCE FORWARD INTO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY!

DO NOT THROW YOUR GARBAGE OUT OF YOUR WINDOW OR INTO THE RIVER. THIS IS CONTRARY TO THE NEW HEALTH CODE. THE GARBAGE COLLECTION SERVICE MAKES ITS ROUNDS EVERY THURSDAY. WRAP YOUR GARBAGE NEATLY AND MAKE IT AS CLEAN AS POSSIBLE FOR PRESENTATION TO THE GARBAGE COLLECTORS.

THE EATING OF DOGS, CATS, AND SNAKES IS NO LONGER PERMITTED. THESE HAVE BEEN PROVED TO BE UNSATISFACTORY.

RIDING ON TOP OF THE BUS IS UNSAFE. THIS MAY RESULT IN

MESSAGE FROM THE PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEE...

DEATH. WAIT FOR THE NEXT ONE OR WALK. THE PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEE AGAINST INDISCIPLINE RECOMMENDS MORE WALKING. PERHAPS YOU SHOULD WAKE UP EARLIER IN THE MORNING TO MEET THE BUS. CITIZENS SHOULD AWAKEN AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE TO BEGIN PRACTISING DISCIPLINE.

ALL CHILDREN FROM THE AGE OF FIVE YEARS OLD UP TO THE AGE OF TEN YEARS OLD MUST ATTEND SCHOOL. A CHILD WHO LEARNS DISCIPLINE AT AN EARLY AGE WILL BE SELF-DISCIPLINED AS AN ADULT AND BRING CREDIT TO HIS NATION. ANY TRUANT MAY RESULT IN THE PARENTS BEING FINED. CHILD LABOR IS NOT PERMITTED EXCEPT AT HOME.

THE PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEE AGAINST INDISCIPLINE WARNS AGAINST DRINKING, GAMBLING, NARCOTICS, SEXUAL DELINQUENCY, AND POOR HYGIENE. INDISCIPLINE IS THE CANCER THAT EATS AWAY AT THE CELLS OF THE NATION.

LADIES: IS YOUR SKIRT CAUSING CONFUSION OR WORK INEFFECTUENCY IN THE OFFICE? YOU MAY BE SENT HOME BY YOUR SUPERIOR BECAUSE OF YOUR CLOTHES AND NOT BE PAID.

GENTLEMEN: ARE YOU PROPERLY DRESSED TO SHOW YOUR DISCIPLINED ATTITUDE? YOUR *ASHKOTI* SHOULD BE WELL IRONED AND KEPT IN PLACE AT ALL TIMES. YOUR *PINGAMBA* SHOULD BE OF A MUTED COLOR SUCH AS BROWN OR TAN, SO AS NOT TO ATTRACT ATTENTION TO YOUR ATTRIBUTES.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN MAY NOT UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES USE EACH OTHER'S FACILITIES OR MEET THERE FOR AN ABNORMAL PURPOSE.

DISRESPECT AGAINST PUBLIC OFFICIALS IS NOT IN HARMONY WITH THE PEOPLE'S NATIONAL PROGRAM AGAINST INDISCIPLINE. SPITTING ON THEM, PROFANITY, OR OTHER ABUSES ARE PUNISHABLE. THIS APPLIES TO THE POLICE, GARBAGE COLLECTORS, HEALTH INSPECTORS, POSTAL OFFICIALS, THE ARMED FORCES, SCHOOL PRINCIPALS, JUDGES, MAGISTRATES, TAX COLLECTORS, GOVERNMENT MINISTERS, ELEVATOR OPERATORS IN GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS, AND THE PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEE AGAINST INDISCIPLINE.

HAVE YOU INSULTED OR CHEATED A TOURIST TODAY? THIS IS HARMFUL TO THE NATION'S REPUTATION. YOU MUST SMILE AND BE PLEASANT AT ALL TIMES. YOU MUST CHARGE FAIR PRICES FOR YOUR PRODUCTS AND SERVICES. IF YOU SUSPECT A TOURIST OF SPYING OR SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITY, REPORT HIM TO THE POLICE OR SPECIAL SECURITY BRANCH OF THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR.

CITIZENS ARE ENCOURAGED TO BE THRIFTY AND KEEP THEIR MONEY IN THE BANK. CURRENCY SPECULATION AND BLACK MARKET ACTI-

MESSAGE FROM THE PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEE...

VITY ARE PUNISHABLE BY DEATH.

WHEN FOREIGN AID SUPPLIES ARE DELIVERED TO THE NEEDY, THEY MUST PRESENT THEMSELVES IN AN ORDERLY FASHION AND REMAIN QUIET DURING DISPENSATION. UNRULY MOBS MAY RESULT IN A RIOT.

ELECTRICITY IS AVAILABLE FROM THE HOURS OF 11 A.M. TO 6 P.M. IN MOST AREAS. DO NOT OVERLOAD YOUR WIRES. USE AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE. CITIZENS IN THE SOUTHERN PROVINCES ARE REMINDED THAT POWER MAY BE SHUT OFF AT ANY TIME. THE PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEE AGAINST INDISCIPLINE IS VERY PROUD OF THE MIRACLE OF ELECTRICITY AND ENCOURAGES CITIZENS TO USE IT WISELY.

ANY CITIZEN SEEN VANDALIZING OR ROBBING A TELEPHONE KIOSK WILL BE SEVERELY PUNISHED. CITIZENS WAITING TO USE A TELEPHONE MUST LINE UP IN AN ORDERLY FASHION AND REMAIN QUIET SO THAT THE USER MAY HEAR WHAT IS BEING SAID.

WITCHCRAFT IS NOT RECOMMENDED.

THE ANCIENT CUSTOM OF *MANAKISHYA* HAS BEEN FORBIDDEN BY THE PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEE AGAINST INDISCIPLINE. ANY BRIDE WHO COMPLAINS TO THE POLICE MAY RESULT IN THE FATHER-IN-LAW BEING FINED OR IMPRISONED. NO CITIZEN MAY MARRY A RELATIVE CLOSER THAN A FIRST COUSIN.

THE USE OF CONTRACEPTIVES BY UNMARRIED PERSONS IS FORBIDDEN.

ARE YOU DISCIPLINING YOURSELF AND YOUR CHILDREN TO ADHERE TO THE PEOPLE'S NATIONAL PROGRAM AGAINST INDISCIPLINE? THIS IS THE DUTY THAT THE NATION DEMANDS FROM ALL ITS CITIZENS. CENSORSHIP OF BOOKS, MOVIES, RADIO, AND NEWSPAPERS IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THIS PROGRAM AND ENSURES A HIGHER MORAL AND SOCIAL AWARENESS.

SEPTEMBER 1ST HAS BEEN DECLARED DISCIPLINE DAY. IN EACH TOWN AND VILLAGE THE PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEE AGAINST INDISCIPLINE IS MAKING PREPARATIONS FOR ITS CELEBRATION. LEARN MORE ABOUT THE MANY FESTIVITIES AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS DESIGNED TO FOSTER DISCIPLINE IN OUR NATION. SCHOOLS AND GOVERNMENT OFFICES WILL BE CLOSED. IN THE CAPITAL A PARADE WILL BE HELD TO HONOR THE WORK OF THE PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEE AGAINST INDISCIPLINE. ALL CITIZENS ARE INVITED TO ATTEND AND ARE ASKED TO WEAR THE NATIONAL COLORS -- RED, YELLOW, AND GREEN. THE PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEE AGAINST INDISCIPLINE WILL AWARD MEDALS TO CITIZENS WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED MOST TO THE PEOPLE'S NATIONAL PROGRAM AGAINST INDISCIPLINE. THE MINISTER OF INTERIOR WILL ALSO ANNOUNCE THE

MESSAGE FROM THE PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEE...

NAMES OF THOSE DELINQUENTS WHO HAVE BEEN MOST HARMFUL TO THE GOAL OF NATIONAL DISCIPLINE, AND IN THE EVENING THERE WILL BE HANGINGS AS AN EXAMPLE TO THE PUBLIC. FOR THIS DAY ONLY, ELECTRICITY WILL BE AVAILABLE IN THE CAPITAL FOR 24 HOURS WITHOUT INTERRUPTION.

ALAN CHERRY IN OUTER SPACE

Disclaimer: This story calls for an explanation, if not an outright apology. Okay, so it's stupid, but a promise is a promise. Let me explain.

One day when I was selling books on the street, this goofy-looking Orthodox Jewish guy came up to me and asked if I had any stories about fat girls. I said no. "You should write one," he said. I told him I'd consider it, hoping to humor him and get rid of him. He went away but came back. "Really fat," he said. "At least three hundred pounds." He was drooling a little. "Right," I said. He went away but came back again. "I want it to be all pleasure and no pain," he insisted. "Sure thing," I replied. He started to leave, but another thought brought him back. "I want you to describe her in detail," he said. "What she looked like and all that." At this point I took out my memo pad and began writing all this down. This made him very happy, and I thought I'd finally gotten rid of him. He left but didn't go more than a few steps before he came back once more. "Make it a harem," he said. "A whole harem of fat girls, over three hundred pounds, with detailed descriptions, and all pleasure and no pain." "Got it," I said, scribbling away. When he walked away, I was sure I'd seen the last of him, but I was wrong. He came back one last time. "One more thing," he said. "What's that?" I asked. "I want it to take place in outer space," he said. "Outer space," I repeated, nodding and adding another note to the specifications. "You got it. It'll be in my next book." He went away for good this time and looked thrilled. It's nice to make a lunatic happy now and then, don't you think?

That was the main inspiration for this story. The additional inspiration came from Alan Cherry, Toronto's most famous clothier. I was spending a lot of time selling in front of the Toronto-Dominion Bank next door to his store on Yonge St. He would pass me occasionally and give me ambiguous looks that could be taken for condescension, incredulity, or amusement (probably a mixture of the three). One day, hoping to get a rise out of him, I said, "I'm going to put you

in my next book!" He replied, "If you put me in it, you'll probably be able to retire!" I don't know whether he meant to imply that I would become rich enough to retire or that I would be forced to give up writing as a result of public outrage. At any rate, I thought I would kill two birds with one stone by putting Alan Cherry in the story I'd promised to do for the weirdo with the fat fetish. Now, I ask you: would any other writer in Canada have the nerve to do this?

Well, I don't know how this is going to turn out. I'm just going to wing it and see what happens.

*

The planet Blorgon -- 86 thousand million zillion miles away, far beyond the planet Pluto. Its climate is very similar to that of Winnipeg. It was discovered in 1987. Today, in the year 2000, commercial space travel to Blorgon has begun.

On Air Canada Flight 999 sat a troubled Alan Cherry. The Animal Rights Party had recently formed the government and had immediately banned the sale of natural furs. Veal sandwiches at Burger King were illegal, and the hamburger and hot dog were fighting a lost cause. No animal could be used for food unless it died a natural death. Cattle and pig farmers would tie their herds to tall trees and wait for lightning. Chickens had to be paid royalties for their eggs. Seals were overrunning Labrador. The fishing industry had collapsed. Its workers now harvested seaweed for health food stores. Laboratory animals were entitled to have a lawyer present during experiments. Mazes for rats had to be redesigned to include rest areas. Pest exterminators had become pest "discouragers"; they were permitted to use only non-lethal means to scare pests away. It was illegal to kill an insect except in self-defense. Stepping on an ant was punishable by a \$100 fine.

Although Alan Cherry sold many other kinds of clothing besides furs (and if you have never shopped at his store at 711 Yonge St., I urge you to do so at once for the very latest fashions and the very highest quality, together with an elegant *ambiance* and friendly, knowledgeable staff), furs were close to his heart and represented significant income. He was now stuck with a huge inventory of unsalable furs in a secret warehouse in North York, while his friend and col-

league, Felix Clawmute, President of Weaselco, who sat to his left on the space ship, had no market for the natural pelts harvested at his secret ranch in northern Ontario. The Animal Rights Party had made the export of furs to other countries illegal, too. They had left only one loophole in the law: furs could be exported to another planet. Alan and Felix had put their heads together and decided to check out the planet Blorgon. If the climate was as cold as it was supposed to be, and if Blorgonians were as human as they were said to be, the two businessmen stood to make a fortune.

The Air Canada stewardess, dressed in the new punk-style uniform (ripped black jeans, black net stockings, army boots, patchy shirt held together by pins and bearing the scrawled message "*All Murder - All Guts - All Fun - ANARCHY*," metal-studded wrist bands, wild black and red make-up on a bone-white base, and spiked orange hair), sauntered by, a reefer dangling from her lips. "You guys want a drink or drugs or something?" she asked.

"A brandy," said Alan.

"Same for me," said Felix.

"I'll have a Molson," said the person to Alan's right, a Canadian poet named Fred Flatus.

"Don't got no Molson," said the stew. "Got Blue. Ya want a Blue?"

"Sure," said Fred.

The stew headed toward the galley, moving her hips in a lewd manner. Fred watched her and wondered what it took to get a woman like that. He turned to Alan and remarked, "What a piece, eh?"

"Whatever turns you on," said Alan.

"Yeah. Say, I don't think I mentioned to you guys I'm a poet."

"I think you did," said Alan.

"Yep, I'm a poet! I'm on my way to Blorgon to give a reading at a library. The Canada Council is paying for it."

"That's nice," said Alan.

"It's part of a reading program for Canadian writers. I tried to get a reading on Earth, but everything was taken this season. Besides, when you're just starting out, they like to send you where you'll do the least harm to your career in case you're really bad."

"Very wise," said Alan.

"Maybe you'd like to hear a couple of my poems!"

"Not really."

The stew returned with their drinks. Fred Flatus ignored his glass and drank his Blue out of the bottle, as *macho* Canadian poets were supposed to do. "Ah, that hits the spot! Now here's a poem from my latest unpublished collection, *Sunrise At Dawn...*"

"It's okay, never mind," said Alan.

*"We intercoured the long day
into the night. Meaning came deep
inside as poem was born
of constant ejection."*

"Oh, Christ," said Alan, gulping his brandy.

"Really hits you, don't it?" said Fred.

"You can say that again."

"Here's another..."

"Please, you don't have to," said Alan.

*"The night rides into your head:
it is a raging bull and has
no business in your bedroom, it
ravages you and knocks against
your ankles;
the thin man hangs from the sky
he is a blurb from a newspaper and
you have cut him with sharp scissors,
your head has told you to do this
because it is night."*

"Oh, my stomach," said Alan, gulping the rest of his brandy.

"Great, isn't it? Say, why don't I read you some more? We've got another six hours to kill."

"Excuse me, Felix. I've got to go to the toilet before I throw up," said Alan, getting up.

When Alan and Felix arrived on Blorgon, they were not prepared for the amazing course of events that was to take place. They had planned to spend a week or two on the planet, check out business prospects, show some sample fur coats, and return to Earth with a more specific marketing strategy. But as they passed through Blorgon Customs and Immigration, the inspector took one look at Alan and fainted straight away. Other Blorgonians rushed to the scene, took a look at

Alan, and gasped a collective gasp. One of them exclaimed, "Cheesacon!" And they all fell to their knees and bowed.

Alan and Felix were stunned. They looked at each other in bewilderment. Finally, a Blorgonian in a blue uniform rose nervously and said, "We await Your command, Lord."

"Can we get a cab to the Hotel Blazitsmo?"

"Thy will be done, Lord!" He blew a whistle and summoned a porter. "A cab to the Hotel Blazitsmo!"

Upon their arrival at the hotel, Alan and Felix witnessed a virtual repetition of the scene at the spaceport. The desk clerk turned white and could not speak.

"We have a reservation," said Alan. "The name is Cherry."

"Cheesacon!" gasped the clerk. He banged his bell for the bellboy. "The Constellation Suite!"

"We only ordered a twin--"

"Nothing but the best for You, Lord!" said the desk clerk.

Alan and Felix were escorted to the most exclusive suite in the hotel by a very nervous bellboy, who tripped several times. When Alan gave him a tip, the boy kissed his hand, burst into tears, and ran out, tripping once more.

"Amazing," said Felix.

Alan walked over to one end of the huge, sumptuous suite, drew the curtain, and looked out upon the skyline of Blorgon City, the capital, with its artificial lighting and perpetually dark sky. It looked like a very Earth-like city, only colder. Little flakes of frozen carbon dioxide fell gently out of a nearly clear sky. The stars shone without twinkling through the calm atmosphere. On the streets below, traffic moved in an orderly fashion. "Felix, did you see anybody wearing fur coats? I didn't. I think we may be on to something big. Felix? Felix?"

"Take a look at this," said Felix, who was sitting on the edge of one of the beds, with the drawer of the bedside table open beside him. He held up a handsome book with gilt-edged pages. "It's their Bible -- *The Holy Book of Cheesacon.*"

"You don't say!" Alan came over and sat beside Felix and examined the book. It was very much like a Bible, only thinner. They leafed through it at random and read various passages. It was only by accident that they noticed the

beautiful painting on the back flyleaf. "Oh, my God!" said Alan.

"It's...it's *you*!" gasped Felix.

The ashtray beside Alan's chair was nearly full. The wheels inside his head, which had been turning too fast for coherent thought, were just starting to slow down. He had not even bothered to undress, although his shoes were off. In the plush carpet there was a noticeable path made from his pacing back and forth.

"I'm starting to piece this together," said Felix, sitting on his bed, immersed in *The Holy Book of Cheesacon*. "Cheesacon is the prophesied Messiah of the planet Blorgon. He was here two thousand years ago and said he would be back someday and would bring something wonderful to his people. He is the central figure in Blorgon's official religion. Now, the painting in the back of the book is obviously a popular conception of what he looks like. I can't find any physical description in the book itself."

"Lucky for me."

"Yes, the resemblance is astounding. Only the clothing is different. Now, in one of these chapters it says, '*The Lord Cheesacon shall come at night from afar with a disciple in a great ship*,' which is just what we did. '*All who see Him shall know Him at once*.' They sure did. You know what this means?"

"Yeah. It means I can call up for a corned beef sandwich, even if it *is* three in the morning." He reached for the phone and dialed room service. Inside of five minutes, the bellboy delivered a tray piled high with Blorgonian delicacies -- *and* a corned beef sandwich. Obviously, the kitchen had been ready and waiting.

"No charge, Lord," said the bellboy. "Thy will be done."

Alan touched the boy's head and said reverently, "You shall prosper and rise to management." The boy went away weeping tears of joy.

"There's something else," said Felix, flipping a page. "Cheesacon is supposed to be endowed with prodigious sexual powers. There's a reference to the Divine Nymphs of the Temple of Cheesacon. I wonder what that means."

"I think it means we'd better eat up now and get plenty

of rest," said Alan.

The next morning around noon, Alan opened the door very cautiously. "Felix, come quick!"

Felix came to the door and looked down. "They've brought you gifts. And there's a card." He picked it up. "*Compliments of the Manager, Floyd-27-Valvobat, Your Loyal Servant.*"

"What is all this stuff?"

"Let's see what we've got here...It's gold...frankincense...myrrh...and a tuba."

"A tuba?"

"This is a very strange planet," said Felix.

Alan and Felix stayed in their suite trying to figure out their next move. Valvobat, the Manager, phoned up several times to see if the Messiah wanted anything. Felix put him off each time.

"We have to make a move soon," said Felix. "By now the word has probably spread across the whole planet."

"What if I have to perform miracles or something?" asked Alan. "Did Cheesacon perform miracles?"

"Of course. According to the book, he walked on a sea of ammonia, raised the dead, cured the sick, and turned water into something called *prel*."

"I'm not sure I like this, Felix."

"Don't worry. You won't have to actually do anything like that. You can give them some bullshit about not having to prove yourself. Hell, they're already convinced you're Cheesacon. They'll believe anything."

At that moment the phone rang again. It was Valvobat, asking to speak to Cheesacon.

"This is Cheesacon," said Alan in a deep voice.

"My Lord, the Emperor Freon asks to see You. He has sent a limousine."

"Hold on...Felix, the Emperor wants to see me."

"We'd better go."

"Yeah, I guess...Hello? Okay, we'll be right down."

Alan and Felix went downstairs. Felix had *The Holy Book of Cheesacon* under his arm. They were led to an enormous limousine by a uniformed driver who begged to kiss Alan's feet. Then they got in. The window behind the driver was up, af-

fording Alan and Felix privacy. Felix resumed his reading of the book.

"I think maybe now's the time to raise the subject of fur coats," said Alan.

"Hold it," said Felix, perusing the book. "If I understand this correctly, Cheesacon isn't supposed to reveal what his gift to Blorgon is until he meets the Divine Nymphs of the Temple. There's something here about false prophets who are motivated only by greed."

"Oh, hell."

"But when Cheesacon bestows his gift, he will be given lots of gold and other stuff."

"Good enough. What do I have to do with the Divine Nymphs, fuck them?"

"I would imagine, although the book is vague on that point."

The limousine arrived at the castle of the Emperor Freon. It was a large but plain building similar to Postal Station 'A' in Toronto, but on the inside it had a sort of Arabian motif.

"Very tacky," said Alan to Felix.

"Shh! Be cool now, Al."

"Cheesacon, not Al."

"Right."

Alan and Felix were brought before the throne of Freon. Alan's first thought was, *Where does this jerk buy his clothes?* The Emperor's costume made him look like a Viking ballet dancer. His crown looked like an aluminum skull cap studded with bottle caps.

Various court officials and members of the royal family stood or sat on either side of the throne. Freon eyed Alan with a certain look of skepticism. Then he got down and knelt on the floor, saying, "Welcome, my Lord. We rejoice in Your presence." Everyone else knelt on cue.

Alan coughed. "Uh, thank you. I'm glad to be here."

The Emperor took his seat again. "*The Holy Book of Cheesacon* has prophesied Your return. Your Divine Nymphs await at the Temple. Now we look forward joyfully to Your fulfillment of the prophecy of Connubiation."

"Of what?"

"*Connubiation*...as foretold," said the Emperor.

"Oh, *that*, heh, heh. Of course." Alan cast a discreet

glance at Felix, who replied with an equally discreet quizzical look.

"But first, I beg You, oh Lord, to hear my confession in private."

"Sure, no problem," said Alan. "I'd be glad to."

Alan and Felix were led into the Emperor's private chamber. The Emperor looked into Alan's eyes. "We have killed many false prophets who were not able to fulfill the prophecy of Connubiation."

"Oh, really? Heh, heh," said Alan nervously.

"They sought to usurp my power. If You are truly our Messiah, I trust You will not depose the Monarchy. After all, I am Your official Pope. I also command Your Holy *Army*," said Freon with an unmistakably malignant emphasis, "and Your Holy *Navy*, and Your Holy *Air Corps*, and Your Holy *Marines*, not to mention Your Holy *Secret Police*, if You get my drift."

"Oh, for sure," said Alan. "Uh, by the way, this is my, uh, disciple, Felix. I never go anywhere without him." The Emperor glared suspiciously at Felix.

"Of course, my Lord," said Freon. "Now, without further delay, may I take You to the Temple to fulfill the prophecy of Connubiation?"

"Uh, yes, yes! Let's get that over with, heh, heh."

The royal limousine took Alan, Felix, and the Emperor Freon to the Temple. During the trip, Alan asked Felix in French what Connubiation was. Felix replied in French that he had come across the word in the book but didn't know what it meant. Freon held his peace, although he didn't appreciate their use of a language he didn't understand.

The Temple of Cheesacon looked something like a Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge with a pseudo-classical facade resembling the Parthenon. As they entered, the smell of incense became evident. They found themselves in a circular lobby with neat ranks of candles sticking out of thick, golden candlesticks. The walls were covered with icon-like images of saints. The largest one showed Cheesacon dressed in a white toga holding a tuba and offering what looked like a potato to three bald midgets.

From behind a curtain emerged another midget, dressed in priestly garb and wearing a headpiece like a World War One German helmet. "My Lord," he squeaked. "I kiss Your feet."

And he did.

The Emperor Freon said, "My Lord, I leave You in the hands of Your Temple-keeper, Floto-18-Snirj."

"Fine," said Alan.

Freon beckoned the Temple-keeper to the door and said to him in a low voice, "Let me know how it goes." He then departed.

Floto-18-Snirj returned to Alan and said, "Lord, I take You now to the Divine Nymph Lardella. This way."

Alan and Felix followed him down a corridor with felt-lined walls until they came to a golden door. The Temple-keeper opened it and extended his hand as a leading gesture. Alan walked forward. "Not you," said Snirj, blocking Felix. "It is not in the Scripture. We will await the Lord here in the hall."

Alan went in. The door was closed behind him. There in the middle of the floor was a large mattress, and on it lay the Divine Nymph Lardella. She weighed 366 pounds. She was dressed in a sheer satin bikini top and g-string. She had enormous breasts and prominent nipples. Her hair was long and chestnut-colored. Her complexion was fair. She wore dark blue eye shadow and crimson lipstick. Her toenails were painted red. "My Lord," she said, "I am Your faithful Connubiatrice for the First Position."

"Heh, heh, that's nice," said Alan, feeling a bit sick.

"Please take Your clothes off, my Lord," said Lardella.

My God! I hope she doesn't get on top! thought Alan.

Discretion forbids a detailed description of the Connubiation of the First Position, and the others as well. The details of the rites of Connubiation are a closely guarded secret of the Church of Cheesacon for three reasons: first, they are considered too sordid and shocking to be known to children; second, they are considered too holy and beautiful to be sullied by the mass media; and I forget the third reason. Suffice it to say that there was much pleasure and no pain. Alan cleverly took his cues from Lardella as he had no idea of what the First Position was. Fat women were a turn-off to him, but he maintained his manhood bravely, for he realized what was at stake.

After forty-five minutes, he exited shakily from the chamber, dressed but looking rumpled. He smiled convincingly. Snirj led them down another corridor.

Felix asked Alan in a low voice, "How'd it go?"

"Good thing I was on top. You should've seen her. A regular elephant, but she had the moves of a gazelle."

"You okay?"

"Sure. By the way, how many of these girls are there?"

"I don't know. There's no specific number in the book. You'd better pace yourself just in case."

Snirj led them to a pink door, opened it for Alan, and closed it behind him. Snirj and Felix sat on a bench in the hall. Felix turned to Snirj and asked, "You like this job?"

"It is an honor to serve Cheesacon."

"You make good money?" Snirj glared at him. "Sorry. Forget it."

Alan's Connubiation of the Second Position was with the Divine Nymph Titania. She weighed 421 pounds, had light brown, curly hair of medium length and blue eyes. She was very fair. She wore a very sheer toga, which revealed gigantic, pendulous breasts. Her ass was wonderfully rounded, and her pubic hair was very short. She had a large mouth and wore pink lipstick. She also wore gold loops in her ears. Her fingers were surprisingly thin and delicate. Despite her weight, she was well-proportioned, if you can believe it. And if you can't believe it, tough.

Forty-five minutes later, Alan staggered out, looking bleary-eyed, but he smiled bravely again. As Snirj led them away, Felix asked him, "What was it this time?"

"Dog-style but with some pretty strange twists. And her vaginal muscles were incredible! And she came five times, I'm sure!"

"Was she fat?"

"Was she ever!...Ahem," he said as Snirj looked back. "Just talking to my disciple."

The third door was green. Snirj opened it for Alan. He went in and found the Divine Nymph Amazonia. She was a very tall Negress with an Afro hair style. She weighed 457 pounds. Her breasts were like giant pumpkins. She wore a loincloth, and a large golden plate hung between her breasts. Her brown eyes glowed with sensual fire. "My Lord," she said, "I welcome You to the Connubiation of the Third Position."

"I'm kind of thirsty," said Alan, running his finger inside his shirt collar.

"You may drink of my own juice, Lord. And I shall drink of Yours." And with that, Amazonia stripped him, set him down on the mattress, and I leave the rest to your dirty Canadian minds.

Alan crawled out of the room on all fours a half-hour later, raised himself on his wobbly legs, and leaned on Felix. "Felix," he whispered hoarsely, "I'm absolutely drained."

"Are You well, my Lord?" asked Snirj.

"Oh, sure! Piece of cake!"

Snirj led the way down another corridor.

"Felix, I'll never make it. I'm only human."

"For God's sake, you can't quit now. If they peg you for an impostor, we're both dead."

"Felix, if you could've seen that giant! And that mouth of hers! It was a like an industrial-strength Filter Queen!" gasped Alan.

"Easy now. If I've got this figured out, there's just one more. We've been going clockwise around the Temple. I've been measuring the intervals in my head."

"Oh, God, Felix, I just can't do it."

"Listen, ask for some *prel*."

"Some what?"

"*Prel*. There's a reference in the book to *prel* inducing gaiety. Or something. Hell, I'm not sure."

"What if it's liquor? I'll pass right out."

At this point they reached a blue door. "Your fourth and final Connubiation, my Lord," said Snirj. He opened the door and admitted Alan.

Alan nearly fainted when he beheld the fourth Divine Nymph. Her name was Margaret. (Fooled you, didn't I?) She weighed 599 pounds. She had short, punkish red hair. She wore black stockings and a black garter belt and had a latex corset with holes through which hung the most enormous hooters in the solar system. When she stood, they reached down below her crotch. Her arms and legs were muscular, and her voice was deep. She had green eye shadow and violet lip-stick. She wore boots with stiletto heels, and she held a whip.

"Got any *prel*?" asked Alan feebly.

"*Prel*?" replied Margaret. "Why, of course, Lord." She took a carafe from a table by her mattress and poured him a

glass of greenish liquid.

Alan smelled it. It had a minty aroma. He tasted it. It was sweet and minty but not alcoholic. He drank it down. A warm sensation spread throughout his body, and he could feel a surge of adrenalin.

"Take off Your clothes, Lord," said Margaret, flexing the whip. She reached up to the ceiling and pulled down a kind of hammock made of rope.

This is about all I dare say about the Connubiation of the Fourth Position. The people of Blorgon are ahead of us in some respects, even if they do have a decidedly warped sense of humor. (I merely want to reassure my Jewish friend from the street that it really was pleasant, not painful.) Fortunately for Alan, the *prel* acted on him as a stimulant. Without it, he certainly wouldn't have survived. What he didn't know was that to Blorgonians, *prel* was a *depressant*. Consequently, this final Connubiation made a great impression when word got back to the Emperor Freon.

Back in the castle, the Emperor proclaimed to the entire court that Alan Cherry was unquestionably the Messiah Cheesa-con.

"Now, oh Lord," said Freon, "what have You brought Your people?"

"Fur coats, Excellency. Made from the skins of exotic animals on a distant planet. They're very warm, and they look great. My disciple Felix can bring you our samples from the hotel. Of course, we only have a few. We have to go back and get more, but I can assure you that we can provide enough for everyone. Now, uh, if you would like to, uh, offer something in return..."

"Of course," said Freon. "We will give You all the gold, frankincense, myrrh, and tubas You wish."

"I can do without the last three, but I can always use gold. It's not for me, you understand. It's for the poor people on other planets. You know how it is, heh, heh, going around the Universe and building golden mansions for them, as I'm constantly doing, heh, heh, not to mention melting it down to make coins, heh, heh."

"Very well, Lord. Thy will be done."

Freon and his court were thrilled by the fur coats.

There was nothing like them on Blorgon. They were much nicer than the peculiar rubberized parkas commonly worn on the planet. "We can also make you fur caps," added Alan.

"And underwear?" asked Freon hopefully.

"Sure thing," said Alan. *Boy, is this a weird planet!*

Alan and Felix were soon back at the spaceport. Alan explained to a group of Blorgonian theologians that he or Felix would henceforth return at regular intervals with fur coats on Air Canada space ships and would be glad to accept a suitcase full of gold each time. This new "prophecy" resulted in a new chapter being added to *The Holy Book of Cheesacon*. Felix also got mentioned. The revised edition also bore an updated painting of Cheesacon in a black pin-stripe suit.

As they were about to board the space ship, a cheery voice called out, "Hey, it's me! How're ya doin'?" It was Fred Flatus, the poet. "My reading went great! And I have a batch of new poems commemorating my trip! You'd love 'em! Where are you sitting on the ship?"

"Thirty-five A and B," growled Alan.

"Hey, I got thirty-five C! That's great! We'll spend the whole trip together, and I'll read you my poems!"

"OFFICER!" Alan shouted, beckoning to one of the spaceport guards.

"Yes, my Lord!" responded the officer, saluting smartly.

Alan clamped his hand on Fred's shoulder. "This man is evil! Take him out somewhere and shoot him!"

"Thy will be done, Lord!"

*

Epilogue: As of the year 2003, the anti-fur laws were still on the books, but at least the Animal Rights Party was no longer in power. They lost their majority when a bus carrying their caucus swerved to avoid a chipmunk and plunged off a cliff. Unfortunately, these things happen only in my stories.

THE PYGMIES NEXT DOOR

Bud and Winky had lived in the suburbs since 1970. They lived in a small split-level house on a street with a lot of similar houses. Bud worked as a warehouse foreman in a plant in an industrial park with a lot of similar plants. He earned enough to cover their expenses but not much more. Winky did not work, although she was by no means lazy or untalented. Far from it. She had virtually exhausted the local high school's adult education catalog, both the practical and the academic offerings, she had taken many correspondence courses from the Department of Education, and she was slowly creeping up on a degree as a part-time student at a local university. Bud had only finished high school, so Winky was taking her time with that degree to let him get used to the idea. Whenever Bud joked about her graduating and getting a job that paid twice what his did, she dismissed it with a laugh, for she knew that eventuality would hurt Bud's pride, even if he didn't admit it. At the very least, he should be allowed to bring home the bacon.

It was tacitly understood that Winky was superior to Bud in almost every way. She was brainier. She was wittier. She was better looking -- a beauty, in fact. (Bud was only average.) She looked younger than he did, although she was older. She was also braver. One night when they thought they'd heard a burglar, it was Winky who leaped out of bed at once and raced down the stairs wielding a hefty hand mirror while Bud stood at the bedroom door yelling at her to come back. (There was no burglar.) This was typical of Winky, who exuded capability, control, and coolness at all times, whereas Bud could scarcely keep control of his crew of shirkers and nitwits in the warehouse. Winky also handled all their financial affairs, having taken several courses at the high school. And Winky had also taught Bud almost everything he knew about sex. She had been vastly more experienced than he before their marriage, but she made it a rule never to talk about that in detail.

They had no children. Instead, they took care of Bud's retarded brother, Louie, who was 30. Winky had taken a

course in mental retardation and had done wonders with him.

Every evening, Bud would come home and hug his wife. Then he would look out the windows, both front and back, and be comforted by the normality and stability of the suburbs. The sameness of day-to-day life made him feel secure. He had had more than fifteen years of it on Winthrop Road and had never grown tired of it.

One Friday evening, Bud came home as usual and hugged Winky, who was cooking a gourmet meal from a recipe in the paper. (She had taken a course in French cuisine.) He looked out the kitchen window and then out the front window, and everything looked just dandy. On his way back to the kitchen, he didn't even notice that something was missing from the living room.

As Bud sat down at the kitchen table, Louie came in through the kitchen door, eyes beaming. "Hi, Bud!"

"Hi, Louie."

"How was work today?"

"Okay. No problems." He couldn't help noticing that Louie seemed even happier than his usual good-natured self.

"Guess what, Bud!"

"What?"

Louie smiled at the two of them. "Should I tell him, Winky?"

"Go ahead," said Winky, concentrating on her *truite amandine*.

"Tell me what?" asked Bud.

Louie sat there glowing with his childish smile. "Guess what."

"You said that already. What?"

"I made some new friends today."

Bud considered this for a moment. "You did?" Louie nodded an exaggerated nod. "Who?" asked Bud.

"Next door!" Louie pointed.

"You mean the McDougalds? You already know them."

"No! Not the McDougalds!"

Bud looked at Winky. "What the hell's he talking about?"

"Let him explain. Louie, explain to Bud."

"They're boys, Bud, but kind of old! And they're short and brown and almost naked!"

"What?"

"They're real nice, Bud! I was playing with them, even though they don't speak English."

"He's putting me on, right?" said Bud to Winky.

"We had fun all day!" Louie continued. "I gave them our TV!"

"YOU WHAT?" exclaimed Bud, standing up and knocking over his chair. He looked at Winky for an explanation, but all her attention was focused on the trout. Louie just sat there smiling naïvely.

Bud dashed into the living room. "*Oh, no!*" He came back into the kitchen. "Winky! The TV is gone!"

"Yes, dear. Wash your hands. It's ready. You, too, Louie."

Over dinner Winky explained the situation. "You see, Louie was in the backyard, and he saw these short, brown people in the McDougalds' yard, and he went over to play with them."

"Where were the McDougalds?"

"They're away on vacation, and they let an anthropologist friend of theirs use their house for an experiment of some sort."

"An experiment? What's this got to do with the TV?"

"I'm coming to that. This anthropologist, Ian, brought these pygmies up from Africa to stay in the McDougalds' house, and Louie got friendly with them, and he *loaned* them our TV. He didn't *give* it to them." She gave Louie a look signifying correction. "Ian said it was all right."

"Oh, *Ian* said it was all right. I like that. And you let Louie take the TV over."

"No, dear, I was upstairs. Louie took it over on his own, and when he told me about it, I went next door and spoke to Ian, and he said it would help with the experiment."

"It would help with the experiment," Bud echoed sarcastically.

"It's to see how the Bongas react to our culture."

"The Bongos?"

"Bongas, not Bongos. They come from the Congo, and they seemed nice and completely harmless."

"*You met them?*" said Bud, choking slightly on his food.

"Of course, why shouldn't I? I've studied some anthropology, you know. I was curious to meet them."

"The fish is good, Winky." Louie interjected. "But

where's the tartare sauce?"

"You don't put tartare sauce on this kind of fish."

"Well, what do they need *our* TV for?" asked Bud impatiently. "Don't the McDougalds have a TV?"

"Yes, but it's broken, and they don't watch TV anyway. You should see their library. They have the most wonderful books."

"But I want to watch TV tonight!" said Bud.

"We watched *Sesame Street*, Bud!"

"Oh, shut up, you!" Bud snapped.

"Don't shout at him," Winky reprimanded him. "Louie was interacting with some strangers, and he hit it off with them. That's very important, you know."

"But I want my TV!"

"Oh, don't be a baby. It's just for the weekend... There's an extra piece if anyone wants it."

"I do!" said Louie happily.

"Bud?"

"No. I want my TV."

"Very well. Louie and I will split the extra fish. Louie, I expect you to eat all that asparagus."

"Can I go over there after dinner, Winky?"

"Yes, if you like."

"You're going to bring back that TV!" growled Bud.

"Will you stop bitching about the TV?" said Winky.

"There are other things to do. We haven't played ping-pong in ages."

"You always beat me."

"Or Scrabble, for that matter."

"You always beat me in that, too."

After dinner, Louie said he was going next door. "Wait," said Winky. "Take them these fudge brownies. They don't have chocolate where they come from. They might like it."

"*You made fudge brownies?*" Bud exclaimed. "And you're giving them to *them*?"

"Ian said it would be all right."

"Oh, *Ian* said so! First it's my TV, then it's my brownies!"

"Oh, stop it. This is an important cultural interaction."

"I'm going now," Louie announced at the back door, plate in hand.

"Bring back that TV!" Bud demanded.

"You just go ahead and have fun, dear," said Winky. The screen door clinked shut behind Louie. Winky turned to her husband. "Really, Bud, for a man who *isn't* retarded, you can be pretty childish at times!"

Winky put on a classical record. She had developed a deep interest in classical music since taking a course at the library. Bud read the paper and fidgeted. He got a beer, sat down, and fidgeted some more. He got another beer, read part of the paper again, and fidgeted still more. In the meantime, Winky read a long story by Chekhov.

By 11 p.m. Louie still hadn't returned. "Shouldn't you go get him?" Bud asked, his tone mild and conciliatory.

"He's thirty years old. He can come home when he wants."

"But Jesus, Wink, he's...*innocent*. He doesn't understand what's what."

"Oh, really? Do you understand what's what?"

"Oh, come off it."

"Louie may be retarded, but he functions very well in many ways."

"But those people...They're not like us."

"That's true. They're shorter. And they're brown."

Bud clicked his tongue in annoyance and stared at the empty space usually occupied by the TV.

"Sweetheart, it's not good to be overprotective," Winky continued. "And besides, Ian is there watching over everything."

"Yeah, right. He's watching my TV and stuffing himself with my brownies."

"What's eating you anyway?"

"I'm bored, that's all. I don't like having my routine upset."

"Want to go to bed early?"

He saw the devilish gleam in her eye but pretended to think it over as if he weren't that interested. "Yeah, okay."

Bud looked at the clock. It was 12:30 a.m. "I guess Louie's staying overnight."

"I guess so."

"I don't understand how a retarded person could make friends with a bunch of pygmies."

"Ian explained it to me. He said that when they looked

into Louie's eyes, they could tell he wasn't afraid. In fact, they thought he was special."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. They consider people like him to be blessed by the gods."

Bud snorted in mild contempt. "And what did they see in your eyes?"

"I think they liked me, even though I wasn't there very long."

"I suppose Ian said so."

"No, I could tell by instinct."

There was a long pause. Then Bud asked, "What do those guys wear? I mean, around the house?"

"Loincloths. They're ever so cute and not at all obscene."

"And you could tell they liked you."

"B-u-u-u-d! Jesus, why are men so insecure?"

"Never mind. I didn't mean anything," he lied. "Anyway, tomorrow I'm getting the TV back." Winky didn't answer. "Eh, Wink? What do you say? I'll get it tomorrow, okay?"

"Suit yourself. Turn off the light, will you?"

Bud slept late after a fitful sleep. He had little appetite for Winky's gourmet breakfast -- strawberry crêpes. Louie still hadn't come back. The more Bud thought about retrieving the TV, the less comfortable he felt about it. Several times he made as if to go out the kitchen door, then thought of some little errand to take care of first. "The garage could use a sweeping." Then: "Maybe I'll do a little weeding in the garden." After that: "Think I'll go to the store for a minute." And so on. Thus the afternoon slipped away. Several times he picked up the TV guide and restlessly scanned the listings, noting the shows he was in danger of missing. Winky said not a word but calmly attended to her domestic chores and then gave herself a good workout on the exer-cycle.

By dinner time, Bud still hadn't made his move. "Wish Louie would get back with that TV," he complained.

"Why don't you just get it yourself?"

"Hell, I don't know how to deal with a bunch of pygmies."

"You can deal with the people in the warehouse, can't you?"

"They're different."

"Yes, they're taller and whiter. And perhaps a bit less intelligent."

Bud frowned all through dinner. "What's that guy's name? Ian? I'll just tell him I want the TV back."

"You do that."

Bud was not sure whether Winky was making fun of him, although that wasn't like her. "He'll probably give me some fancy scientific reason for holding on to it."

"Maybe. But after all, you're a grown man, too. You can speak for yourself, can't you?"

"Damn right!" said Bud, choking slightly on his dessert. He put down his fork with a resounding clink. "That's it. No more horsing around. I'm getting that TV." He stood up.

"You've got whipped cream on your face, dear."

"What? Oh." He wiped it off, then wiped his hands and face excessively. "Be back in a minute," he said shakily and went out the kitchen door.

As he approached the McDougalds' backyard, he caught sight of a small, brown face staring at him from a window. This startled him momentarily, but he continued to the short flight of steps leading to the McDougalds' kitchen door, determined to get the unpleasant task over with as quickly as possible.

He knocked on the door. He could barely hear some strange voices and the sound of the TV inside. The door opened, and there stood Ian, a man in his thirties with short, red hair and a bushy beard, wearing a baggy pullover shirt screaming with a pattern of improbably-colored flowers, a large, grotesque necklace of polished wood and bones, and a little gold earring in one ear. In one hand was a briar pipe with an oversized bowl. His look was cold and intense.

"Yes?"

"Uh, say, I live next door, and my brother brought the TV over here without my permission, and I want it back... Please."

Ian looked down at him -- literally, for the kitchen floor was a step above the top of the back steps -- and his expression hardened into a sneer of contempt. "So, you've come for the TV," he said slowly, as if speaking to a child.

"Yes, it's my TV. I'd like it back, please," said Bud.

Ian sucked on his pipe and blew some smoke just above

Bud's head. "The suburban white man, the paragon of civilization, the culmination of a million years of human evolution, would like his television set," Ian intoned mockingly. "God forbid the suburban white man should be bereft of his holy idiot box for an entire day. Oh, what a catastrophe."

"Now, look, I just want the TV, that's all. And Louie should come home, too," said Bud, feeling queasy.

"God forbid your brother should engage in a social interaction with non-white, non-Western non-suburbanites."

"My brother's retarded. I don't think they know that."

"There's no such word in their vocabulary," said Ian stiffly.

"Oh," said Bud, puzzled. "Well, look, about the TV--"

"Your TV!" Ian spat angrily. "That's the most important thing in the world to you! Never mind that right next door to you an important social experiment is taking place which stands to clarify contemporary theories on cultural assimilation and the relevance of semiotics to structural change in undeveloped societies!"

"I didn't mean to imply--"

"Never mind that this whole planet is on the verge of self-destruction because of human ignorance and cultural barriers and that I, as a social scientist, am engaged, in my own modest way, in an experiment that could lead mankind one step closer to the development of the global consciousness necessary to forestall that destruction! Oh, no! I should stop all that so that you don't have to miss *I Love Lucy* tonight!"

"*Lucy's* on tomorrow night."

"Or perhaps hockey or wrestling or the latest moronic soap opera, or whatever your cretinous cerebrum cries out for to pacify itself and reaffirm the superiority of your rotten white, suburban, bourgeois, ethnocentric value system! You, in your callow ignorance, cannot even imagine a vocabulary that has no word for 'retarded' or, indeed, any *Weltanschauung*--"

"Any *what*?"

"--that does not derive its normative and existential postulates from an electrical appliance!" Several of the pygmies had stepped shyly into the kitchen to observe the scene but were keeping their distance. "If you had the least bit of education, you would understand that *these human be-*

ings--" Ian pointed behind him. "--are equal to you!"

"Look, I have nothing against the Bongos as individuals--"

"BONGAS, NOT BONGOS, YOU RACIST!"

"Bongas, sorry. I just--"

"GO ON BACK TO YOUR WHITE, SUBURBAN CASTLE AND LOOK IN THE MIRROR AND CONTEMPLATE YOUR NUGATORY EXISTENCE AND KINDLY LEAVE SCIENCE ALONE!" He slammed the door in Bud's face.

"Hey! Hello?" Bud knocked on the door. "LISTEN, I HAVE TO WARN YOU ABOUT THE FINE TUNING. IF YOU TURN IT TOO FAR TO THE RIGHT, IT'LL GET STUCK. LOUIE DOESN'T KNOW HOW TO FIX IT. YOU HAVE TO TAP IT A CERTAIN WAY...HELLO?" He peered in through the slightly parted window shade on the door. A brown face with a weird lip plate stared back. "Oh!" exclaimed Bud, frightened. He turned away and headed back to his house, cursing to himself.

He walked into the kitchen, where Winky was doing the dishes. She made no comment about his returning without the TV. He could feel himself getting pink in the cheeks. "That Ian uses some pretty fancy words, heh, heh," he said.

"Mmm," said Winky.

Bud scratched his head and turned his back to her, looking out the window at the familiar normality that he was so attached to. But now that normality seemed a sham, and it no longer comforted him. He imagined being a cave man looking out of the entrance to his cave. But he would not be like the rest of his tribe. No, he would be the ridiculous and cowardly weakling of the tribe who was afraid of small lizards. He would have to eat with the old women and cripples after the tough cave men got all the best pieces of meat. He would be the only able-bodied cave man on welfare. Every day or two, one of the other hunters -- perhaps a sympathetic cousin -- would slip him an egg or a fish. He would be the only cave man who could not start his own fire. He'd have to borrow a flaming twig from the cave next door. Younger (or even older) cave men would borrow his wife and have sex with her. Children would beat him at games of strength and skill. The heads of his spears would keep falling off. The other cave men would tease him by imitating a saber-toothed tiger when he went out at night to pee. He would be the only one of his tribe to die from an infected hair follicle.

"Uh, say, Wink," he said hesitantly. "I don't sup-

pose..." He hated himself for saying it. "I mean, seeing as how you've already met those people..."

"Mmm?" she said, working through the dishes with great efficiency.

"Maybe it would be better if you got the TV back. That is, if you don't think it would cause a problem or anything."

"Let me just finish the dishes," she said, and his heart leapt with joy and then sank again with guilt.

"Don't bother drying. I'll do it," he said, picking up the towel.

"Okay." She stacked the last dish and smiled at him sweetly. "Don't hold your breath, though. I'm not going to just go over there, ask for the TV, and come back. That wouldn't be very polite."

"Oh, of course. I understand. You stay a while and have a nice little visit. Take your time." He applied himself happily to the dishes in the most powerful, masculine manner he could manage.

"Okay, see you later," said Winky, going out the kitchen door.

Just let Ian pull those fancy words on her! She knows just as many as he does! Ha!

Bud finished the drying, then went into the living room and put on a country & western record on the stereo. Then another record. And another. Then he went down to the basement and threw darts for a while. Then he had a beer. And another beer. Then he threw some more darts.

By then it was dark out, and Bud started to get restless. *What could she be doing over there? She couldn't even talk to those Bongos or Bongas or whatever.* He went out to the back steps and looked at the McDougalds' house. There was a bit of light in one window but that was all. He considered going over there but thought better of it. So he went back inside and threw a few more darts and listened to a few more records. He looked at his watch constantly, which made the time pass all the more slowly.

By 11:45, he could scarcely sit or stand in one place for more than a few seconds. He walked around the house with no clear purpose, looking out the windows. He was now very angry at Winky for taking so long. He had missed all his favorite shows. But beyond that, he also felt uncomfortable not having Winky around. The night courses he was used to.

This was different. 11:45. *Doesn't she have any idea of the time?*

He thought of taking a shower. *Yes, that's it. A shower. Get myself all sweet-smelling and then wait for Winky in bed.* He took a shower, and as he stepped out he called downstairs in the hope that she might have returned. She was still not back. He had felt sexually excited in the shower but now felt deflated and apprehensive. He put on his pajamas, lay in bed, and watched the clock.

12:15. *Goddamn it!* he said to himself as he changed back into his clothes. *I have to go over there!* He wondered whether to put on his shoes or just his slippers and decided he'd look more presentable with his shoes, even in the dark.

He went to the back steps of the McDougalds' house again and knocked on the door. There was no sign of life inside. He knocked again. Finally, he heard footsteps coming to the kitchen door. The back light went on, and the door opened. It was Ian again, but he looked different. He was wearing a T-shirt and did not have his pipe or necklace. But the bigger difference was his expression, which was one of excitement rather than hostility.

"Excuse me, but I believe my wife, Winetta, is here," said Bud.

"Yes, yes, she is, but don't worry! Oh, this is astounding! Astounding!" Ian said breathlessly. "Nothing like this has ever happened between the Bongas and a Caucasian! It's revolutionary! The impact...the cultural interaction...I..." He touched his forehead in sheer distraction, his gaze going above Bud's head for a moment as if toward a miraculous sight on the distant horizon. "This upsets all previous writings on Bonga culture -- their taboos, their mores, their normative postulates! The textbooks will have to be rewritten! I'll write an article for *The Anthropological Quarterly*, that's what I'll do!"

"Well, that's very nice, but would you tell Winetta to come home now?"

"No! Not now! It hasn't finished! I have to see how far this cultural interaction will go!" He put his hand on Bud's shoulder. "Don't worry about a thing! I promise you everything is fine, just fine! This is a great event in anthropology! We can't interfere!"

"Oh," said Bud, bewildered. "Well, is she going to be

here all night?"

"Yes, I'm sure of it. Now, you just go on to bed and don't worry about your wife. She obviously knows how to handle herself in any situation. God, what a woman!"

"Yeah...She's a great gal...Uh...well, okay...If it's something important..."

"Yes, yes!" said Ian, patting his shoulder reassuringly. "I'm sure she'll tell you all about it tomorrow. Don't worry about a thing."

"Okay, then."

"Good night!" Ian shut the door and turned off the light.

Bud headed back to his house, scratching his head in confusion. *What the hell?*

He went back inside, went up to the bedroom, changed back into his pajamas, and got into bed. *What exactly did he mean? Cultural interaction...taboos...how far it will go...* He turned off the light and pondered Ian's words for a long time, occasionally rubbing his brows in deep thought. The luminous hands of the clock stood out clearly in the dark, and its faint electric hum seemed disturbingly loud. He was acutely conscious of the empty space beside him where Winky would normally be. He held her pillow against his side with one arm and caressed it lightly as he wondered what "great event in anthropology" could be taking place next door. And then a thought struck him suddenly, and he froze, his heart racing with fright. *Wait a minute! Wait a minute! No, not that! Anything but that! Oh, Winky! You couldn't!*

So Bud lay sleepless and disconsolate all night, and several times he indulged himself by crying, leaving Winky's pillow wet with tears and mucus.

The dawn was just breaking, and Bud was just drifting off to a hard-earned sleep born of emotional exhaustion when the sound of the kitchen door woke him up. He heard footsteps, both Louie's and Winky's. Louie's went into the living room, then to his bedroom. Winky's came up the stairs and went into the bathroom. The water ran briefly, and the toilet flushed. She came into the bedroom, dragging herself like a tired marathon runner.

"Wink?"

"Yes, dear."

"Where were you?"

"Next door."

"No, I mean, what were you doing?"

"I'm very tired, dear. Let me get some sleep, okay? We'll talk tomorrow." She stripped to her panties, put on a nightie, and got into bed, her back turned to him, and pulled the cover over her head.

He wanted to question her but didn't have the nerve. Maybe the truth was something he didn't want to hear. And anyway, she was back safe and sound, and that was some relief, at least.

After a minute or so, he got up and went down to the living room. The TV was in its proper place. He went back up to bed, pulled the cover over his head, and snuggled up to Winky, who was already asleep. Then Bud fell asleep, too.

Bud awakened around noon to the smell of bacon and the muted sound of the TV. He went into the bathroom, which was still steamy from Winky's shower, wiped the condensation from the mirror, and looked at himself. He looked frazzled and in need of a shave, but he was too tired to shave. Besides, if a man wanted to skip a shave on Sunday in the privacy of his own castle, well, goddamn it, he could!

He went down the stairs softly and found Winky in the kitchen, looking perky and beautiful with all her make-up. She was carefully checking the progress of a quiche in the oven. "Good morning, dear," she said cheerily.

"Good morning."

"It's not quite ready yet."

"Okay." He went into the living room, where Louie sat in his pajamas watching a circus program. "Hi, Louie."

"Hi, Bud. You know what? They're gone," he said with some sadness.

"Who's gone?"

"*Them*," he said, pointing toward the McDougalds' house.

"What, all of them?"

"Yup. They left in the station wagon this morning. I didn't even get to say goodbye to them."

Bud went to the front window and looked out at the familiar street, which bore no sign of anything unusual having happened. "Say, what happened last night?"

"What do you mean?" asked Louie.

"I mean, what went on?"

"We watched TV, and then I got sleepy, so I went to bed."

"And what was Winky doing when you went to bed?"

"Nothing much. They were in the playroom watching TV."

"So you don't know what happened after you went to bed?"

"No, what happened?"

"I'm asking you."

"How would I know if I was asleep?"

"Yeah, right."

Bud took another look out the front window out of habit, then went into the kitchen and looked out the back window. All was quite normal there, too. "So, what happened?" he asked Winky, his back to her.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

He turned to face her. "Ian said some kind of stuff I didn't understand, like something important was happening."

"Mm hmm," she said ambiguously, removing the pan from the oven. She set the pan on the table in the precise centre of three place settings of her best china. "Well, darling, I got into a very complicated situation and just couldn't leave. I'm awfully sorry."

"What exactly happened?"

"Really, it's best not to go into details. Just take my word for it that it was all for a good cause, and everything worked out fine." She kissed him on the cheek and stroked his whiskers. "Okay?"

"Okay, I guess."

"You didn't sleep well last night, did you?"

"No."

"Well, I made the coffee strong this morning." She unplugged her percolator and brought it to the table.

"I just want to know one thing, Wink," said Bud, still unhappy. He hesitated, eyes cast downward. "I want to know ...if anything...if anything is different for us now...You and me, that is...I wouldn't want anything to change...Hell, you know what I mean."

She gave him a hug of reassurance. "Sweetheart, things are exactly the same. I wouldn't want them to change either."

He smiled. "I'm glad. You know, I couldn't help thinking...Oh, never mind. Anyway, I guess it's a good thing to try to understand another race. That anthropology stuff can be very important."

"Yes, indeed." She tasted a smidgen of her quiche and nodded in satisfaction.

He sat down at his usual place and watched her as she continued getting everything ready on the table. "And those Bongas probably aren't bad chaps, even if they are real primitive."

"Mm hmm."

"I'm sure they must have felt very strange to be here."

"Yes, you're right."

"But they must have felt relieved when you and Louie made friends with them."

"Absolutely."

"It was probably a contribution to mankind."

"It certainly was."

"Imagine what they'll say to their friends and families when they get back to Africa. I'll bet their culture will never be the same."

"You can count on *that*."

"I think they should do this sort of thing more often. You know, different races teaching each other what they know. I think it's a wonderful thing."

"Yes, and full of surprises."

"We could probably learn so much from a race like the Bongas if only we were willing."

"No doubt," said Winky, buttering the last piece of toast. "But I'll tell you one thing."

"What's that?"

"This time around, I did the teaching, and they did the learning," she said with a sly grin as she wiped her hands.

"That's nice," said Bud automatically. Suddenly, his smile changed to a look of shock. "*Winky!*"

"LOUIE, BREAKFAST IS READY."

MELON MAN

I was in my mother's house after getting out of the mental hospital. I wanted something sweet to eat, so I looked in the refrigerator. There were five or six half-eaten donuts in various corners, some of them apparently quite old. It was a bad old habit of my mother's.

"Why do you have to eat part of a donut and stick it back in the fridge? You must have six halves left in here."

"Never mind," she replied defensively from the living room couch. "I have some nice chocolate cookies in the cabinet. They're not even opened."

"You don't have any milk. I wanted some milk."

"Go to the store then. There's a new A&P in the shopping centre."

"Oh, yeah? What happened to Grand Union?"

"It's still there, but I don't like it any more. Go to A&P. Take the car."

"I'd rather walk. It's good exercise."

The shopping centre was a mile away, but I didn't mind walking. Walking by myself lets me think, and thinking is interesting, even if it's sometimes sad. People don't walk in the suburbs. They only drive, so they must be happier. During the entire mile to the shopping centre, I didn't pass one other person. When I got to the intersection of Woodbury Rd. and South Oyster Bay Rd., I waited for the *Don't Walk* signal to change to *Walk*. The traffic lights went through their red-green-yellow cycle three times before I realized that the pedestrian signal was fixed perpetually on *Don't Walk*. What's more, the other pedestrian signal was also fixed perpetually on *Don't Walk*. If I wished to obey the law, I would have to stand on that corner forever. I thought this was even stupider than elevators in high-rises with no thirteenth floor. I don't understand this world any more. I really don't.

The A&P was on the north side. It looked nice and modern. But my heart longed for the old Grand Union on the south side. I had to cross against the *Don't Walk* signal to get to it. If a policeman had caught me crossing illegally,

I don't know what I would have said.

The Grand Union was older, smaller, and shabbier than I remembered it, but I still like that sort of market. There were no fancy cash registers or computerized scales. The old produce man was still there, and he still weighed things in that hanging scale and figured out the price in his head and wrote it on the bag in black crayon.

For some reason, I couldn't find the milk section. There seemed to be a few containers here and there in various sections, some of which weren't even refrigerated. And there were all different brands. I didn't understand it. I had to think about this for a while.

I walked around noticing how bare the shelves were and how few people there were. I suddenly desired an apple more than anything else in the world -- a crisp, juicy, sweet apple. The apples were scattered in various places, too -- a little pile here, another little pile there. I saw some unusual apples that were large and somewhat flattened and had a bluish tint to them. So I picked one up. I had to eat it right away because I couldn't resist. It wasn't too bad. Not exactly an apple taste -- a bit like a pear, if I may say so. I walked around eating this bluish apple.

And then I happened to see this large bin on the floor that was full of very large watermelons. They looked battered and discolored. A sign on the bin read: *Slightly Abnormal Melons. 14¢ a pound.*

A man stopped to examine the biggest watermelon in the bin. He was balding and had a moustache. He wore a nice olive-green zippered jacket and nice trousers. This was a respectable man. From one of his sleeves he extracted a long knife and without hesitation sliced a large section out of this melon. I can understand a person feeling a piece of fruit to test it, but I must say it was going a bit far to slice this melon open.

The inside of the melon was a sick-looking green, and the pulp was mushy. Juice dripped to the floor and made a green puddle with a few little seeds in it. No one noticed any of this. It was quite strange. The man put his nose right into the melon and sniffed it. His eyes rolled in evident ecstasy, and he dug his fingers into the green mush. Then he picked up the melon, which was quite a huge one, believe me, and walked quickly out the back door, which was not

even guarded. I saw him get into a gold-colored Mercedes, and I could see the heads of a woman and child in the rear window. They looked back toward the store as if in fear of being apprehended, but as I said, no one noticed. The car drove away.

I stepped up to the puddle of wet mush on the floor at the foot of the melon bin and bent down to look at it more closely. At once my nose was assailed by a terrible stench I could not begin to describe. *Slightly Abnormal* indeed! What in the world had these melons been through? Where had they come from?

I decided I'd had enough of Grand Union for today. I would go across to the A&P and get some milk. I still had the core of my apple in my hand, and as I went out the front door, a grey-uniformed figure seemed to step out of a slot in the grey wall and grabbed my arm.

"You've eaten one of our apples, sir," he said sternly.

"Oh! An oversight, I assure you!"

"I must ask you to follow me," he said.

"Hey, what about the guy who walked out the back with the big melon!" I protested. "You didn't even stop him!"

"Let's not have a scene, sir."

And once again I was led away.

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